

Coral Reefs, why should you care?

and Stag Horn coral is dead and gone. Currently, coastal development and land based sources of pollution threatens 35% of the reefs, while 60% of reefs are being damaged by over-fishing. Coral reefs worldwide yield a total food value of over US\$100 billion per year not because it's the primary source of protein for over 1 billion people but there is also an extreme demand for sea food.

Coral reefs provide vital ecosystem but only a very tiny portion of the sea bottom is covered by coral reefs. Reefs house or are nursery grounds for over one million marine species. Corals are part of cancer medication research, which focuses on marine organisms living on the reef, coral is used as an alternative in bone replacement treatments, bio-fuel is developed by using algae and the balance of fish and coral provides resources, which are part of the Aruba tourism product. Tourism is the world's largest employer and accounts for more than 255 million jobs globally. Tourism income generated in the Caribbean region is about US\$ 140 billion per year. With an average of 1.4 million tourists per year, Aruba is not investing in research, monitoring and management of its marine resource. Based on surveys tourists



are willing to pay for marine and environmental protection as long as they know where the money is going to spend on and if they get a feeling of being part of something. When selecting a destination the tourist expects one of the single most important factors, which is the quality of the



large fish.

Aruba is the only tourism destination in the Caribbean that doesn't have a marine park or marine protection program in place. Not only in place but it has to also be functional and have enforcement because otherwise it is just a paper park.

Regulation and enforcement are crucial. Even without a marine park, Aruba does have laws against spear fishing since 2001, but these laws are violated regularly by people engaging illegally in spear fishing practices due to lack of enforcement.

While the rest of the world is engaging in marine life protection, conservation and preservation, this is not being done in Aruba.

Illegal spear fishing is a lack of respect for the law, the government, the people making a living in tourism and also a slap in the face of the entire tourism industry. It's time for Aruba to take a stand. Sustainable aquatic tourism and marine environmental damage can't go together.

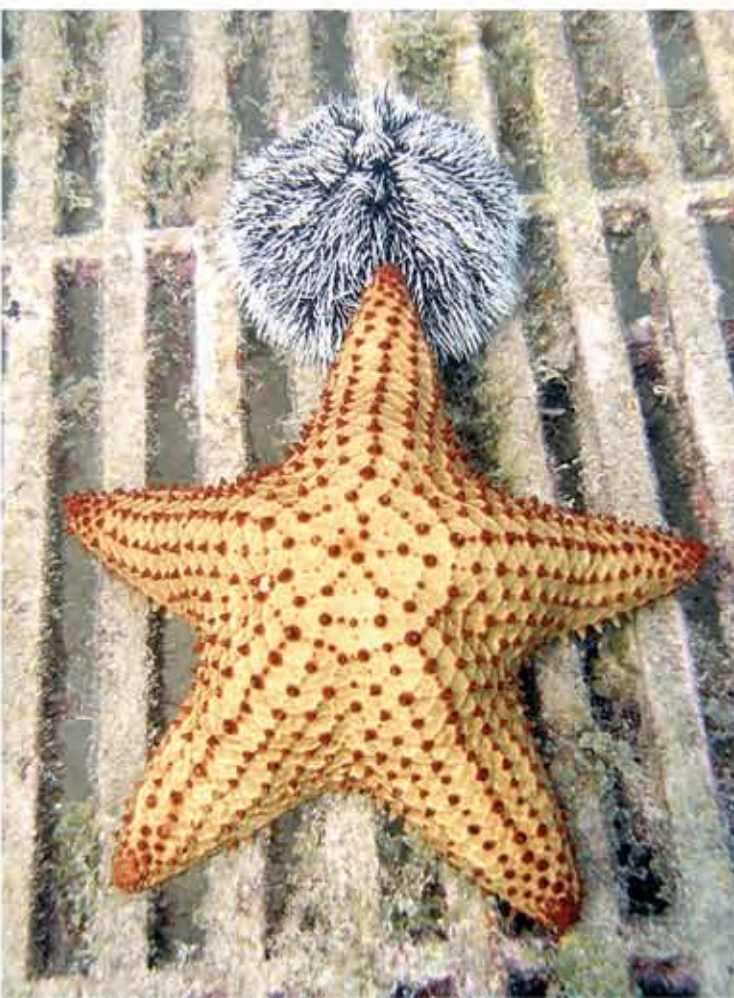
Coral reefs need a balance, which includes fish, balanced fishing methods and balanced protection for all involved. Traditional fishing with hand lines is the best alternative that most fishermen in Aruba are using to make a living. Coral reefs



are degrading fast and spear fishing is definitely going wipe out the fish balance necessary to maintain the marine ecological balance.

With no protection and by allowing spear fishing, the use of drag nets or any unregulated marine practice, Aruba's coral reefs are bound for extinction. The end result is a considerable decrease in aquatic tourism activities such as snorkeling, boat trips and scuba diving. The coastal waters will start to change from crystal clear to low visibility due to lack of natural filtration from the reef systems and the fish. The low visibility will also affect the level of oxygen and nutrients in the coastal waters.

No fish and no coral reefs will mean less tourism, less jobs and less economy. □



Sustainable tourism is the use of natural and cultural resources in order to development a partnership among local government, the private sector and the community to provide a unique visitor experience and to improved quality of life through an equitable and self sustaining basis.

Aruba's main source of income has been tourism since the early 1960's but strange as it may sound, very little has been done in general to protect the tourism product, in particular the aquatic tourism part. Many tourists come to Aruba or return every year to enjoy the crystal blue waters and the marine resources, which includes the coral reefs. The Caribbean reefs have suffered an 80% decline during the past three decades and 80 to 90% of Elkhorn

